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Samantha Snively

Andrews University

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Meeting Jesus

BY SAMANTHA SNively

The annual Andrews University Easter Passion Play 2011 rotations drew to a close. Hospitality tent volunteers watched lives change all morning as they encountered Jesus through the story. Late that afternoon, six-year-old Claire Jordan visited the Easter Passion Play with her family. She smiled at the baby goats jumping around in the marketplace and stared in awe at the Roman soldiers with their large spears. But most of all, she wanted to meet Jesus. Her request was about to remind the entire 700-member volunteer cast why they signed up.

Claire watched the reenactment of Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection. When she arrived in the hospitality tent, she asked volunteer Naomi Best if she could meet Jesus. Claire wanted to ask Him in person the prayer she’d been praying every night—if He could take away her (inoperable) brain tumor.

But Jesus was nowhere to be found. In fact, each of the eight actors portraying Jesus was in another rotation. While volunteers looked for a Jesus, Claire met an angel and a Roman soldier. Hearing of her request, Naomi and the resurrection scene cast decided to stage a special performance for her. Justin McAuliffe, one of two students portraying Gabriel in the scene, volunteered to fill in for Jesus. At first, Claire sat on Naomi’s lap, but then she asked to get closer to Jesus.

From onstage, where she held an angel’s hand, Claire watched the disciples put Jesus in the tomb. She saw the struggle between the good and bad angels, ending in Gabriel rolling away the stone to reveal the risen Jesus who walked out and hoisted Claire onto His shoulders. The entire resurrection cast then assembled for a photo with Claire, who gleefully sat still on Jesus’ shoulders.

As the cast dispersed after the photo, Claire pulled Jesus aside—she wanted to ask Him her question now. Claire and Justin talked one on one. At one point, Justin told Claire that when Jesus came again He would take her but leave her illness behind. “She was really excited about that,” says Justin, “and I got to hear her laugh for the first time.” He was amazed by her faith and resilience. “She didn’t expect instant gratification,” Justin says, but she knew in her heart that Jesus would heal her some day.

Reflecting on the experience later, Justin realized that although his role was unique—not many people have the chance to play Jesus—“it’s an experience that we should have, as Christians, every day. When you take on the title of ‘Christian,’ you take on the ‘Christ’ part, too.”

Claire illustrated childlike faith to Naomi who remarked, “To see a little girl who was in that stage of illness and was so vibrant, and had so much faith, … meeting her made me believe in God ten times more than I did before. I see why our faith is to be childlike.”

Every Easter Passion Play has its own stories and its own miracles, but to the volunteers who interacted with Claire this one stands out. “Each year impacts your life in some way,” says Naomi, “but this year was truly life-changing.”

Samantha Snively is a student news writer in the Office of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.